

## Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 DODE-00

CIAE-00 /026 W

-----053494 161112Z /10

O 151137Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8789

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMAMBASSY JIDDA 2219

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION USUN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 6 CORRECTED)

LONDON FOR ATHERTON/ SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, SY, XF

SUBJ: SYRIA AND THE PEACE PROCESS

1. FONMIN KHADDAM WAS NOT PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE LONDON TALKS DURING OUR DISCUSSION JULY 12 (DAMASCUS 3975). THIS IS HARDLY SURPOISING GIVEN THE EVENTS IN LEBANON. NEVERTHELESS, HIS ATTITUDE MAY REFLECT MORE THAN THAT OF A HARASSED OFFICIAL SPENDING MOST OF HIS WAKING HOURS ON CRISIS MANAGEMENT.

2. FOR ONE THING, WHILE THE LONDON TALKS AND THEIR AFTER-

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MATH HAVE THEIR POTENTIAL PITFALLS FOR SYRIA'S CURRENT POLICY (THE U.S. MAY GET SOME MEANINGFUL CONCESSIONS FOR BEGIN, JORDAN MAY DECIDE TO JOIN IN PROCESS, SADAT MAY OPT FOR A SEPARATE PEACE), THE SYRIANS DO NOT REALLY BELIEVE ANY OF THESE SCENARIOS WILL COME TO PASS. THEY ARE CONFIDENT THAT SOONER OR LATER THE SADAT PROCESS WILL GRIND TO A HALT DUE TO PRECEIVED ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE.

3. FOR ANOTHER, KHADDAM REFLECTED THE ATTITUDE OF A MAN WHO HAS SAID IT ALL BEFORE. IT IS AS IF SYRIAN THINKING ON THE PEACE PROCESS WENT INTO COLD STORAGE THE DAY SADAT WENT TO JERUSALEM. WHAT CONCERNS US IS THAT THE LONGER SYRIA STAYS OUT OF THE PEACE PROCESS, THE MORE ANACHRONISTIC ITS THINKING BECOMES AND THE HARDER IT WILL BE TO TURN THE PROCESS AROUND, ASSUMING A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT REMAINS OUR GOAL. THE PROBLEM IS THAT, GIVEN THE SYRIAN PERSPECTIVE RIGHT NOW, IT IS PROBABLY THEY SEE NO URGENCY TO ENGAGE IN SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER TWO YEARS.

4. THE PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, MUHSIN BILAL, TOLD US RECENTLY THAT THE REAL ARGUMENT ASSAD HAS WITH SADAT IS THAT THE LATTER IS PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE WITH ISRAEL IN SPITE OF A FLAGRANT CASE OF ARAB POLITICAL AND MILITARY ANEMIA. ASSAD PROBABLY CANNOT GET OVER HIS MILITARY TRAINING WHICH TELLS HIM YOU DO NOT CHOOSE TO GO INTO BATTLES WITHOUT, AT A MINIMUM, APPROACHING PARITY WITH YOUR OPPONENT. BILAL'S AND PROBABLY ASSAD'S, VIEW OF THE SITUATION IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS LONG HELD A SERIOUS MISCONCEPTION OF THE ISRAELI BODY POLITIC. THE U.S. HELD THAT ONLY AN OVERWHELMINGLY STRONG ISRAEL COULD MAKE CONCESSIONS.

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BILAL SUGGESTED THAT WE COMPARE ISRAELI ATTITUDES TOWARD THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AFTER THE 1973 WAR AND NOW. KISSINGER WAS INITIALLY SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE THERE WAS "RELATIVE MILITARY PARITY" BETWEEN THE ARABS AND THE ISRAELIS. AS HE DESTROYED THIS PARITY MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY THROUGH MASSIVE ARMS SUPPLY AND BY SINAI II, HE FOUND DECREASING GIVE IN ISRAEL'S POLICY.

5. ASSAD, ACCORDING TO BILAL, DOES BELIEVE PEACE IS POSSIBLE, BUT ONLY WHEN PARITY WITH ISRAEL IS ESTABLISHED BY THREE FACTORS COALESING: 1) AT ARABS ARE SUFFICIENTLY UNITED TO COORDINATE THEIR POLITICAL AND MILITARY POLICIES; 2) THE UNITED STATES IS POLITICALLY UNITED BEHIND THE ADMINISTRATION IN SEEKING A JUST SOLUTION TO THE MIDDLE EAST PROBLEMS; 3) ARAB ARMIES ON BOTH SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN FRONTS ARE SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO POSE A CREDIBLE THREAT TO ISRAEL (NOT TO ITS EXISTENCE BUT TO ITS MANPOWER)

6. THE POINT IS THAT BILAL'S THREE FACTORS CANNOT COALESCE FOR SOMETHING TO COME, IF EVER, SOME FORM OF

ARAB UNITY MAY WELL BE DEVISED IF THE SADAT INITIATIVE IS ABANDONED (AS SYRIA BELIEVES IT WILL BE), BUT WHILE SYRIA IS BOGGED DOWN IN LEBANON IT CAN HARDLY ANTICIPATE POSING ANY REAL THREAT TO ISRAEL. ACCORDING TO BILAL, EVEN IF LEBANON COULD BE SOMEWHAT STABILIZED IN A YEAR THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE CAUGHT IN THE THROES OF A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. IN SHORT, WE WONDER IF SYRIA IS NOT THINKING OF NOVEMBER 1980 AS THE THRESHOLD FOR ANY SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS.

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ACTION SS-25

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-----044173 151318Z /43  
O 151137Z JUL 78  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8790  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
AMAMBASSY JIDDA 2220  
EMASSY LONDON 1073  
USMISSION USUN  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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EXDIS

LONDON FOR ATHERTON/ SAUNDERS

7. AS FOR HOW THE SYRIANS SEE US GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE WITHOUT A DANGEROUS VACUUM IN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, SYRIANS, AND BILAL AMONG THEM, HAVE SPOKEN OF THE NEED TO GO BACK TO THE JOINT U.S.-SOVIET STATEMENT IN GENEVA. IN THE SAME BREATH THEY TALK ABOUT THE EXAMPLE OF THE VIET-NAM NEGOTIATIONS WHICH DRAGGED ON FOR YEARS. THE SYRIANS MAY WELL SEE GENEVA OR TALKING ABOUT GENEVA AS A WAY TO MARK TIME AND STAVE OFF THE THREAT OF WAR WHILE THEY SEEK TO RESOLVE THE LEBANON EMBROGLIO, BUILD THEIR STRENGTH VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL, AND ALLOW THE PROCESS OF SHIFTING U.S., AND MAYBE EVEN ISRAELI, OPINION TO GERMINATE.

8. CLEARLY, IF THE USG WERE TO CONCLUDE THAT A REAL  
CHANCE FOR PROGRESS IN PEACE TALKS EXISTS IN THE SHORT  
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TERM EITHER THROUGH THE SADAT FROMEWORK OR SOME  
EXPANDED FROMEWORK, THEN IT WOULD FOLLOW THAT SYRIA,  
GIVEN ITS APPROACH, MIGHT HINDER THAT PROGRESS. WE  
SHOULD NOT GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO PRECEDURALLY GERRY-  
MANDER A FREMEWORK TO MEET SYRIAN SPECIFICATIONS.

9. HOWEVER, IF WE CONCLUDE THAT THE PEACE PROCESS  
IS NOT GOING ANYWHERE FAST, IT MIGHT BE WORTHWHILE  
TO MAKE A START AT TRYING TO BRING THE SYRIANS BACK  
INTO THE PROCESS. EVEN A PROTRACTED AND POSSIBLY  
STERIAL PROCESS HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF HELPING  
TO STAVE OFF THE THREAT OF WAR AND PREVENTING POSSIBLE  
SYRIAN DRIFT TOWARD REJECTION. IT SHOULD BE REMEM-  
BERED THAT SYRIA WAS VERY HESITANT ABOUT ENTERING A  
GENEVA NEGOTIATION FRAMEWORK WHICH IS FEARED WOULD  
WIND UP IN FAILURE. SYRIAS FORESAW A PROTRACTED  
PERIOD OF INDIRECT NEGOTIATION PRIOR TO ACTUALLY  
GOING TO GENEVA. EVEN THIS PROCESS OF REENGAGEMENT  
COULD FORCE SYRIA INTO DECISIONS, BY VIRTURE OF ITS  
INVOLVEMENTS WITH OTHER ARAB STATES, WHICH IT WOULD  
OTHERWISE BE UNWILLING TO MAKE. ONE THINGIS CLEAR,  
SYRIA HAS MOVED VERY LITTLE IF AT ALL OVER THE PAST  
SIX MONTHS IN ITS THINKING ABOUTPEACE AND THIS,  
IF IT CONTINUES, DOES NOT AUGUR WELL IN THE LONG  
RUN FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE.

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## Message Attributes

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